

HIGHER EDUCATION OF WOMEN AT COLBY

THE suggestion in the last catalogue of Colby that a college for young women should be developed as a distinct department of the University, has attracted wide attention and provoked much comment. The opinions expressed upon the proposition have proved that the subject of the higher education of women has not been exhausted. They show further that the possibilities of providing most suitably for the culture of young women have not yet all been tried. More than this, it is evident that along with progress in almost everything else pertaining to the college, advance, both in theory and in practice, is to be looked for in this important portion of Colby's work.

We will not attempt to describe in detail the college for young women, co-ordinate with the college for young men, which the ideas now prevalent at Colby will eventually develop. It is safer to analyze those ideas themselves, and to allow each reader to predict the future which they foreshadow.

We understand, then, that certain positions regarded as tentative, or altogether disregarded, twenty-five years ago, are not now doubtful or obscure. Nobody at Colby any longer asks, for example, whether young women can do the work of a college course creditably and profitably. The question has been answered so many times that there is no more room for doubt. The success of the young women at Colby has, indeed, been so uniform and high as to encourage the hasty conclusion that the young women are better qualified for such work than the young men. The truth is that it has required rare courage and self-reliance for a young woman to pursue a course of study under the conditions thus far prevailing at Colby. The young women who have been graduated have accordingly, as a rule, possessed mental and moral qualities of an exceptional order. Without them they would not have faced the difficulties with which they have had to contend. To state candidly the conclusion

LC1601
H6

17877 2

which is warranted by the experiment with co-education at Colby: young women of special intellectual strength, combined with unusual energy and resolution, have competed successfully with the ablest young men in their classes. It can hardly be claimed that Colby has data for a generalization about the relative position which the average young woman would hold in an average class. The impression is strong, however, that young women with sufficient perseverance to complete a regular preparatory course will have no difficulty in accomplishing the college curriculum with credit.

It is too late to ask whether young women desire the privileges of a college course. Of the contestants for the college scholarships recently offered by the Boston Herald, exactly fifty per cent, according to the published lists, were young women. Persons who have been familiar with educational institutions two or three decades, have expressed their belief that, if it could be made as easy for young women to go to college as it is for young men, a larger proportion of young women would be found in Maine eager to pursue a college course than were willing to finish a high school course of superior grade twenty-five years ago. A few enquiries among the preparatory schools of Maine would convince any skeptic that comparatively slight changes in the conditions of college life, offering to young women encouragements to enter college relatively equal to those presented to young men, would result, almost immediately, in enthusiastic acceptance of collegiate advantages by a very large number of young women.

On the other hand, if we understand the conclusions which a majority of our faculty have reached, they think an ideal college course for young men would not be an ideal course for young women, any more than the training which would be most advantageous for a bass singer would be advisable for a soprano voice. We realize that the college differs from the university in that the latter provides training for specialists, while the former is devoted to general culture. Colby does not propose to overlook this distinction; but the discovery has been made that a scheme of general culture for a man may prove to be monstrously special culture for a woman. We do not believe that the mind of a woman lacks any rational faculty which belongs to men, nor that it can afford to despise any forms of discipline which would complete the intel-



lectual development of a man. We do believe, however, that the various means of intellectual culture should be asserted in different proportions, according as the subjects of culture are men or women. Colby at present dares to risk her reputation for progressiveness by confessing her adherence to the old-fashioned idea that the typical woman is not the one who finds her sphere in public life, but rather the one whose ambitions center in the family. While the normal man is also in domestic relations, his activity should be social in a larger sense than that of a woman. The general culture which he needs, in order to become an intelligent factor in the industrial and civil relations, must be derived largely from exact and critical investigation of both abstract and concrete laws and phenomena.

The normal woman is not the school-teacher, nor the organizer of philanthropies, nor the reform agitator, but the wife and mother. The mental and moral culture most appropriate and desirable in her sphere would be chiefly derived from attention to the humanities, in their most comprehensive modern sense; those developments of thought in which the affections, the tastes, the moral sentiments, are exhibited and exercised.

In other words, there is the same incongruity, though it is less obvious, in professing to offer an ideal course of culture by uniform training of men and women, that there would be in proposing a common curriculum as an ideal course of preparation for both pharmacy and pedagogy. Such a scheme must be either so general as to be inadequate to the requirements of either pursuit, or it must be so special that the claims of the one are sacrificed to those of the other.

The new departure desired in the education of women at Colby justifies itself by repudiating the doctrine, so dear to the woman's-rights champion of our time, that women are simply men in skirts. It regards women as destined to a sphere of usefulness different from that of men, and hopes to be able to cultivate those mental and moral qualities in which the normal woman should excel,

Another conclusion at which the majority of our faculty have arrived, is that when young men and women have reached the age for entrance to college, competition and rivalry between them is unnatural, unwholesome, inexpedient, and disagreeable to both parties, and to their

instructors as well. Theorists should not be heard on this point, but the observation of men of experience should be accepted as decisive. Co-education has been so thoroughly tested at Colby that conclusions are now warranted. The effects of the system on the students, and the impressions which it makes upon the instructors are sufficiently familiar in all their diversities, to justify inductions. The observations thus far made at Colby have furnished an answer to the argument long assumed to be unanswerable :—Boys and girls are together in the family, in the school, in the church, in the social gatherings, why not in the college?

The answer is, that in family, church, society, the association of boys and girls conforms with natural conditions, while membership of the same college class necessarily places young men and young women in unnatural relations. They become contestants in a struggle for scholarly position. This relation partially defeats the evident intention of nature, that masculine and feminine thought should be not competitive but complementary.

The answer applies also to that part of the argument which refers to the lower schools. Boys and girls grow up together in the public schools unconscious of anything anomalous in their relations as classmates, until late in school life. The reason is that masculine and feminine characteristics are not sufficiently differentiated, and comparatively little dissimilarity exists at an early age, between the intellectual processes of a boy and those of a girl. But when the change from school to college takes place, and young men and young women meet in the class-room as total strangers, they are no longer so many particles in a mass of homogeneous intellectual neutrality: they are aware of manly and womanly maturity which had been unnoticed among associates from childhood. In the new association, both masculine and feminine personality asserts itself more or less consciously. The artificial relation of rivalry entered into under such circumstances provokes, in both young men and young women, a certain unformulated protest, which is nevertheless of such reality and strength that it throws both into an unnatural attitude of mind, and sooner or later dulls the sentiments which ought to dignify and adorn the relations of each sex with the other.

The consequence of this fact appears in the opinions prevailing among

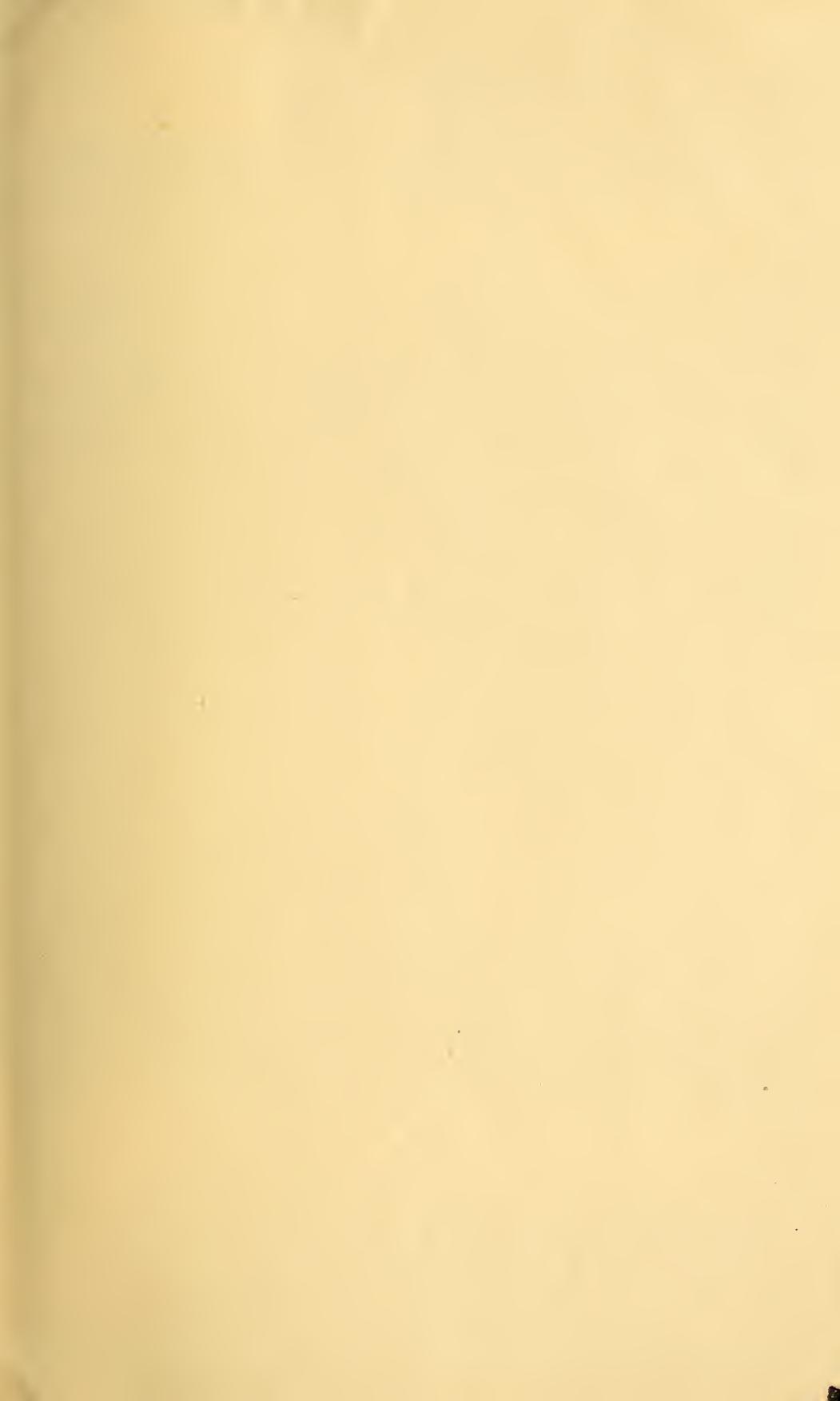
the students on the subject of mixed classes. The original ungenerous prejudice against the admission of women to college is a thing of the past at Colby. Whatever unfriendliness may at any time have existed between the young men and the young women has given place to reciprocal respect and cordiality. At the same time it is probable that if the opportunity were offered to choose whether recitations should be regularly in classes composed of both young women and young men as at present, or in classes composed exclusively of young women or young men, both the ladies and gentlemen now in college would elect the latter plan. Under the present organization both are conscious of a certain restraint which makes it impossible for either young women or young men to make the best use of opportunities for question and discussion.

These conclusions from the experience of Colby have determined the present aim of the college with respect to the higher education of women. Co-education, even as thus far conducted, has accomplished wonders in the way of gratifying results. All gloomy forebodings of dangers likely to wreck the experiment, have proved groundless. The opinion which is now asserting itself is that the ideal college, for both young men and young women, would not be a college for one of the sexes alone, but an institution in which young men and young women would enjoy perfectly equal privileges of instruction, while all possibility of competitive antagonism, or direct rivalry between young men and young women would be prevented by separate classification of ladies and gentlemen. Not because co-education has failed, but because *imperfectly organized* co-education has so unexpectedly succeeded, do its friends at Colby believe that more perfectly organized co-education will achieve results superior to any that can be expected from exclusive institutions. Colby is now strong enough, and co-education is sufficiently tested, to justify a step ahead. We believe the time has come for Colby to show the courage of her convictions, by offering to young women not merely toleration, but attractions that will make judicious parents desire to secure the advantages of Colby for their daughters as well as for their sons. This can be done first by the formation of distinct classes for young men and for young women, or really two colleges within the University; and second, by providing for the development of courses in natural and political science in the college for young men, parallel with the expansion of

courses in language, literature, history and aesthetics in the college for young women. This plan will remove the only rational objection to co-education that can now be discovered.

So far as we can learn, there is no college in the country offering a course of education comparable in breadth and thoroughness with that given at Colby, which enables students to pursue the course for so small an amount of money as suffices in Waterville. To make this provision easily available for the young women of Maine and the neighboring States, by the development of a woman's college within the University, it will not be necessary to duplicate recitation rooms, laboratories, libraries, cabinets and art collections. All these will be adequate for two colleges as well as one. Whoever may in the future wish to establish higher education for women on the broadest foundation in Maine, will be able to build upon the material acquisitions already secured at Colby. Additional endowment will of course be necessary for increase of the teaching force. Until the friends of Colby are convinced, by the growing number of young women in the classes, that this additional endowment is demanded, the faculty are likely to be called upon to do double work of instruction. That they consent to bear this burden temporarily is proof that they are interested in the higher education of women, and that they have faith in the ability and willingness of others to make permanent provision for this enlargement of Colby's usefulness.

We decline to draw a detailed picture of Colby in the future; but it is not difficult to imagine that in a few years Colby will be a University of two colleges, the one giving to two hundred young men, the other to two hundred young women a more genuinely liberal education than can ever be imparted to either men or women in colleges of less generous ideals.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 019 646 354 9